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Disney Female Lead Characters: Then and Now

There has been a change in the prominence of female lead characters in new Disney movie. Classic animated Disney movies were significantly regressive, and the only aspects that surrounded Disney princesses are their beauty and being rescued by a male character. This paper intends to reveal the disparity that exist between the female lead characters of the Disney classic, *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *Frozen* (2013).

Most columnists applauded the modern heroine when *The Little Mermaid* was released in 1989 by Disney. Different from her forerunners, Ariel is exhibited as a completely accomplished female character that is rebellious and independent in her thinking and acting (Guo).

However, upon close review, it is evident that *The Little Mermaid* signified a regression in the production of princess films. This is because the movie is based on a young woman but is excessively filled with talking by men. Some studies indicate that this was the first Disney animated film where the male characters substantially outspoke the female characters (Guo).

This practice initiated a particular trend on the prominence of men talking more than the women. It is evident that in *The Little Mermaid*, the plot concerns the challenge of Ariel losing her voice. Still, Disney worsened this situation by giving female characters even fewer chances to speak in subsequent films. In these movies, it was found that male lead characters have three times as many lines as female lead characters (Guo).

Films that preceded *The Little Mermaid* exhibited fewer speaking roles but incorporated more gender balance. This movie introduced a modern approach of making Disney movies that developed from Broadway musical with huge ensemble casts. Gender inequality increased with the addition of characters to the films.

Still, there are Disney movies where the female lead characters were more prominent than the men in dialogues (*Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *Snow White*). In fact, most films that were created 50 years ago offered more chances for women to express themselves in dialogue adequately.

Even approaching the millennium, it is still evident that men heavily populate Disney movies. Apart from the heroine, the flicks provide few instances where female lead characters are revered, powerful, comedic, and useful (Guo).

The most obvious stereotype in these new films is that of a lonely princess attempting to find a husband, but not doing anything necessary for empowerment. There are no instances where the female lead character guides the community to attack the terrible beast, women discovering things, women connecting in the tavern while singing drinking songs, or women providing leadership to themselves. Anyone that is involved in a different activity, aside from getting someone to marry, is generally, a male.

The Little Mermaid emphasized more on the appearance of Ariel than her achievements. More than 50% of the commendations the women received were attributed to their looks. A mere 11% of the compliments were concerned with their accomplishments or capacities (Guo).

Nevertheless, in the latest Disney releases such as *Frozen*, there is a reversal of the trend of gender inequality. This is the first time that female lead characters are commended for their accomplishments or skills than for their appearances. For instance, in *Frozen*, 40% of the praises

given to female lead characters comprise their skills or achievements, whereas only 22%

incorporate their looks (Guo).

In *Frozen*, Elsa, the snow queen says to her sister: "You cannot marry a man that you

have just met" (Buck 00:26:36-00:26:39). Although this line resonates with the experiences of

real-life, Disney did not initially embrace such a path. In fact, *Frozen* is among the first Disney

films where the female lead character does not marry at the end of the movie.

This was Disney's effective way of demonstrating that it is more adapted to a new

generation of young girls, that desire to be princesses, but are also diligent and independent in

their lives. It seems that Disney discovered that the new generation young girls anticipate

something higher than expecting a true love kiss from a stranger prince.

All in all, it might be assumed that carelessness and some extent of deliberate move could

be blamed for the stereotyping that existed in classical Disney films. Still, there is development

regarding this concern as Disney is creating movies that inspire women to be bold, strong, and

resolute.

Works Cited

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